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A Brief Introduction to the Global Obesity Epidemic

Eric Finkelstein, Ph.D., M.H.A.

Associate Director

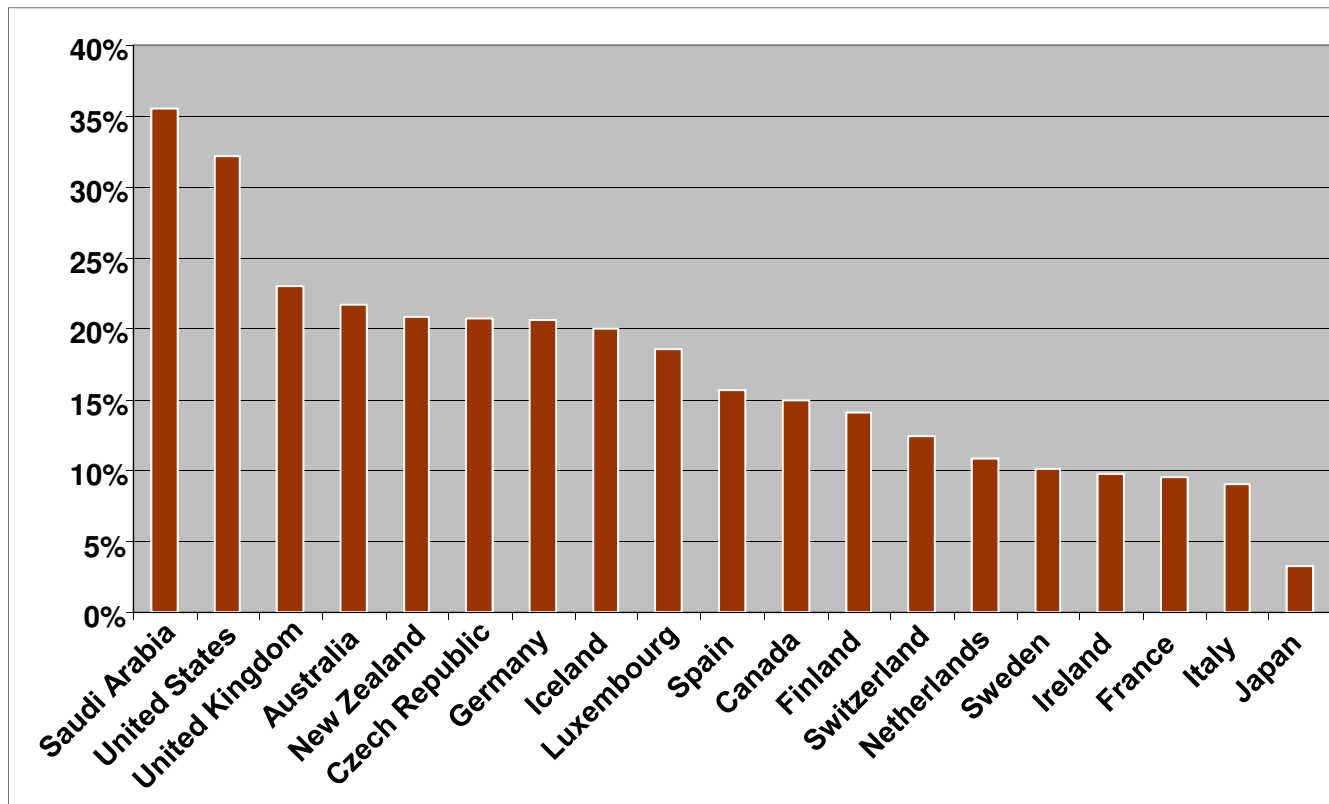
Health Services and Systems Research Program

eric.finkelstein@duke-nus.edu.sg

Obesity is a Global Problem

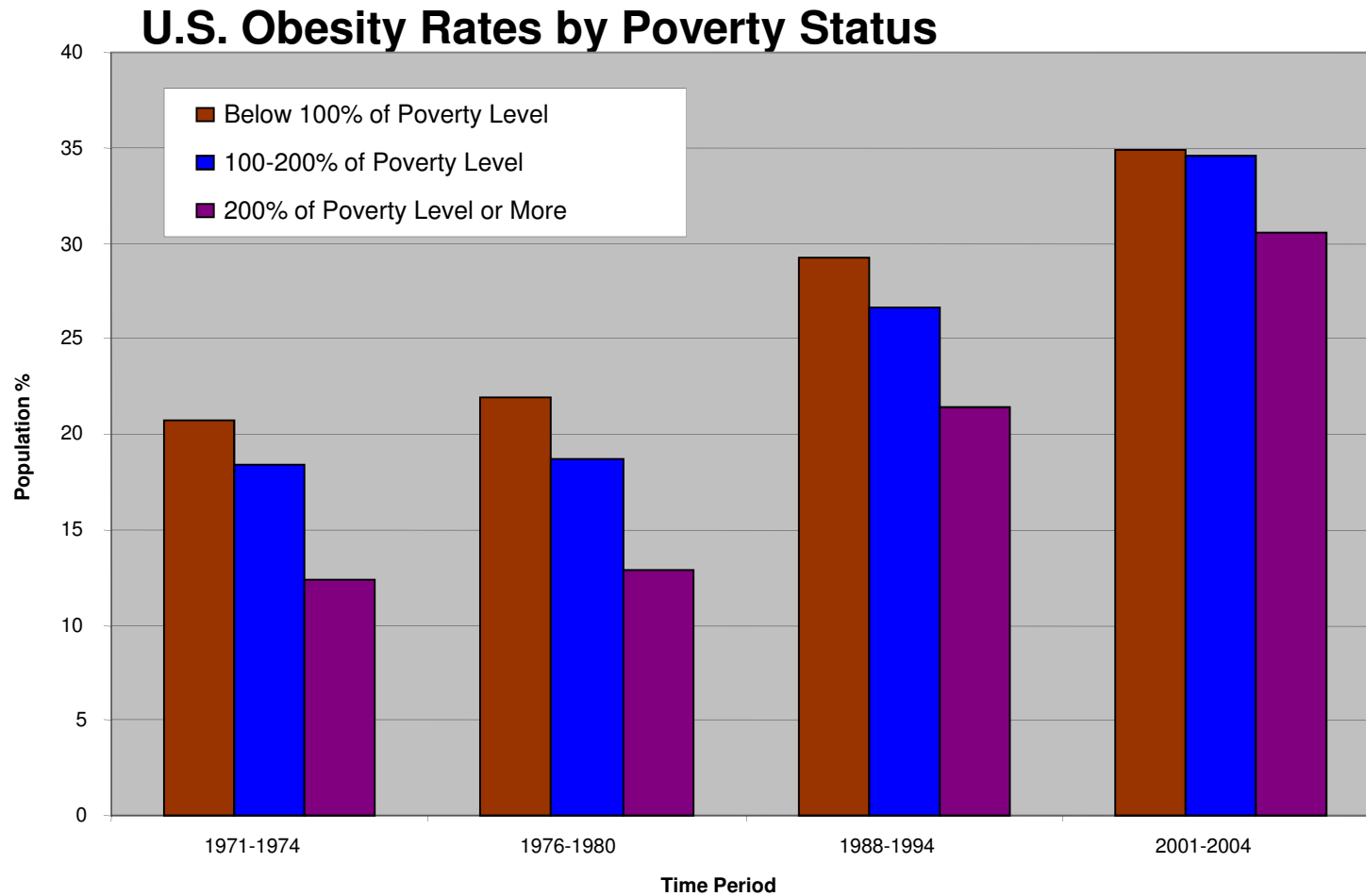
- Over 1.6 billion adults worldwide are overweight and another 400 million are obese
- At least 20 million children under 5 are overweight
- By 2015, WHO predicts 2.3 billion overweight and more than 700 million obese adults

Obesity is a Global Problem (cont.)



Source: "WHO: Global Database on Body Mass Index" and "OECD Factbook 2006: Quality of Life – Obesity"

Obesity and SES Status



Source: "Health, United States, 2006." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus06.pdf#073>

Why The Rise In Obesity Rates?

The story of Mauritanian women

“Fears are growing for the fate of thousands of young girls in rural Mauritania, where...the cruel practice of force-feeding young girls for marriage is making a significant comeback”

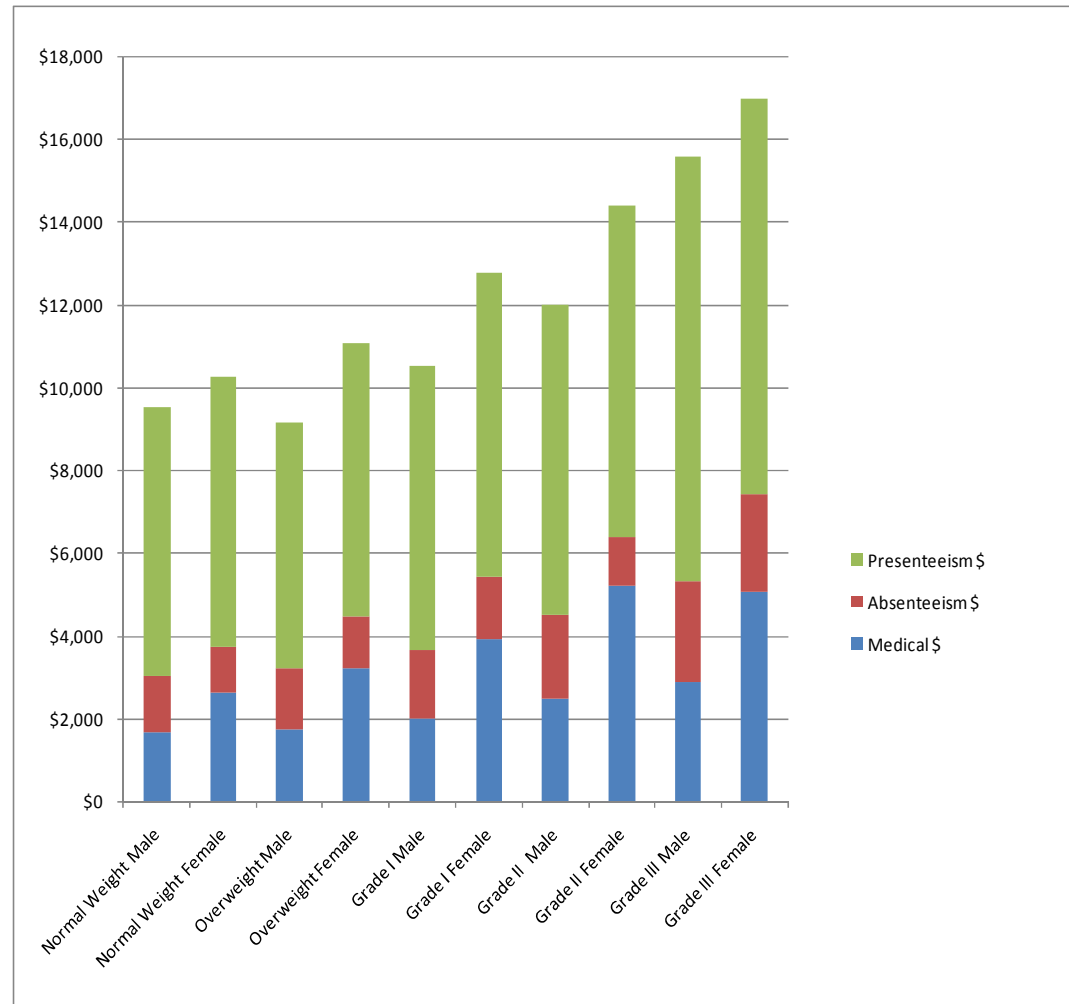
Implications?

Role of Gov. as Seen by Economists

- Government should intervene only in the case of market failures (or undo past government failures)
- Market Failure occurs when resources are not being allocated efficiently by the private sector
 - Externalities
 - Market Power
 - Public Goods
 - Imperfect (Asymmetric) Information
 - Consumer Irrationality

Financial Implications of Obesity

- Obesity results in increased medical \$ and reduced productivity
- For employers, lost productivity is the dominant cost
- In U.S., obesity is responsible for 9% of all medical spending, or as much as \$147B per year



Source: "The Association between Obesity and Productivity Loss" Hema Kannan MPH, Eric Finkelstein, Ph.D., MHA, Somali Misra Burgess, Ph.D., and Brent Hale R.Ph., Presented at ASMBS, 2009.

What Will A Successful Obesity Intervention Look Like?

- A successful obesity prevention program **MUST** make it cheaper and easier to be thin—not fat
 - Interventions that lower the barriers to healthy behaviors and/or increase the costs of obesity promoting behaviors are likely to be followed by changes in behavior
 - Must do the opposite of where the economy is headed
- Information is a **Necessary** but not **Sufficient** Condition for Success

Concluding Comments

- Technological advancement and obesity go hand in hand
- Economic forces have changed relative costs of food consumption, physical activity, and obesity:
 - Decreased cost of food consumption
 - Increased (opportunity) cost of physical activity
 - Decreased health costs of being obese
- Although the health problems are personal, the cost implications are shared
 - All benefit from a less obese and healthier community